



A Supervisory Newsletter from the Employee Advisory Service (EAS)

THE FRONTLINE SUPERVISOR

Helping You Manage Your Company's Most Valuable Resource – Employees

Call EAS: Olympia (360) 753-3260 Seattle (206) 281-6315 Spokane (509) 482-3686

Website: <http://hr.dop.wa.gov/eas.html>

■ Q. I worry about one of my best employees. For some time now, we've spent several hours a week talking about her personal life problems. She's missing more work now, but when she's here, she makes up for lost time. What do I do?

A. A supervisor needs to focus on the employee's job performance. If a person is truly one of your best employees, this means they take less of your time and energy for supervision. A caring supervisor can inadvertently become too involved in what is happening in an employee's personal life. Even if the work is getting done, the amount of your time taken to keep the employee on track has become excessive. An EAS referral is appropriate. Call your EAS office to let them know of your referral, so that you will be told if the employee follows your advice. This may be the encouragement your employee needs to take the positive steps needed. Stepping back from the personal issues could help you both, and still show your concern.

■ Q. Although the Employee Assistance Professional did not actually agree with my decision to terminate an employee, I ended our discussion with the feeling that I had a "green light." I think EAS believes there is nothing left to offer this employee. Should I assume this is the case?

A. Do not relinquish responsibility for ownership of your decision or infer from the EA professional's consultation that the termination decision is supported or not supported. The response you got in the conversation with the EA professional should be interpreted only as his or her professional responsibility to neither encourage nor discourage administrative action. That decision belongs to you and your agency. This prevents EAS from interfering with your organization's administrative processes and is fundamental to the integration of EAS in the work culture in its work performance-based support. The expertise of EA professionals should not be used as a means to judge your management decisions. A disappointing outcome of the decision you thought was supported by EAS could cause you to blame EAS later.

■ Q. My employee was caught playing computer games for the third time, when he should have been working on an assignment. This is clearly against our agency policy. I am sure this employee knows where I stand on this matter. Is there any reason to make a referral to EAS?

A. A supervisor referral to EAS is appropriate because a continuing performance-related problem exists. Your employee may know your stand but continues to violate agency policy. This situation is a good example of a problem that may not necessarily be what it appears. A wide range of issues other than lack of knowledge or even defiance may explain your employee's behavior. None would excuse the violation of your agency policy, of course, but they may be related to stopping the behavior. Your employee is willing to risk increasing penalties for violating the policy. Why? Whatever action you take, EAS can explore the answer to this question, help him correct his behavior, and explore options to resolve his personal problem.

■ Q. My employee has been accused of sexual harassment by a female worker. Should I make a referral to EAS while an investigation is pending? If so, what will EAS do for him?

A. If you are a manager investigating a sexual harassment claim, it can be helpful to remind the accused employee that EAS can offer support. Prior to the completion of an investigation, this may include helping the employee prepare for the possibility of a finding against him. An accused employee will frequently deny the intent to harass, and will have feelings of anger and betrayal toward the complainant. Although accused employees are usually warned against retaliation, support from EAS can aid in preventing retaliation. If a finding of sexual harassment is formally made and a referral to EAS follows, EAS will consider other help to prevent further sexual harassment. Regardless of the outcome of a finding, both complainants and alleged harassers are usually very upset. This anxiety can affect performance, lead to depression, and can affect the personal lives of all those involved. This provides a rationale for separately referring both the complainant and the accused to EAS.

■ Q. Feeling guilty and sympathetic causes me to shy away from administrative actions with employees with performance problems, who aren't making changes. I kick myself every time I do it. Can EAS help me?

A. EAS can help you with assertiveness skills needed to manage your employees. Start by seeing employees as responsible for taking charge of their lives and using resources like EAS to resolve personal problems. Non-performing employees use EAS resources more often when they do feel accountable for unsatisfactory performance. You may feel guilty when attempting to take appropriate administrative actions because you are concerned about your employees. Some supervisors hesitate to see that it is the employee who is responsible for making such an action necessary. This view may actually worsen performance or conduct problems. To maximize employees potential, support them and act earlier to hold them accountable for satisfactory performance. Believe that employees can and will act in their own best interest. Responsible supervision expects that employees can manage their own lives.

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Visit EAS on our website at:
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